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Ag in the Classroom

United States
Department of
Agriculture

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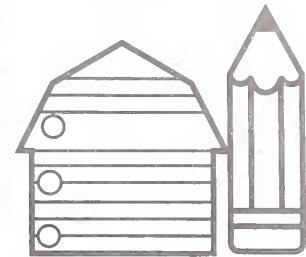
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Notes

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact: Shirley Traxler, Director, Room 317-A, Administration Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-2200. 202/720-5727

FEB/MAR 92
Vol. 8, No. 2



Michigan Institute Supports, Excites Teachers

"The underlying philosophy of Michigan's Summer Institute is simple," says its director, Eddie Moore of Michigan State University. "We are here to help teachers ... so they can help their students."

Clearly, it's working. Two years ago, the first Institute enrolled 13 teachers. When they returned to their schools full of enthusiasm and great ideas, it prompted more teachers to attend the second Institute. Now in its third year, the program has become so popular that a second session has been scheduled this summer for teachers in the Detroit area.

"Farmers in the rural areas have done a tremendous job of reaching out to schools in their area," says Julie Chamberlain, who also serves as a state contact for AITC in Michigan. "But we simply don't have farmers in downtown Detroit and Grand Rapids to do the job. We feel the Summer Institute is a wonderful way to meet the needs in the urban areas."

The Institute, sponsored jointly by the Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan State University, begins with an examination of the National Education Goals introduced by President Bush and the nation's governors. "We want to make sure teachers understand the relationship between what we'll be doing at the Institute and national trends in education," says Moore, who also serves as one of the state contacts for AITC in Michigan.

Teachers who attend the Institute learn about agriculture and how it can be integrated into all the basic academic subjects. They also learn about science and technology, global/international education, international trade, the economics of the food and fiber system, Michigan's

food and fiber system, new and emerging career opportunities, and Michigan natural resources.

The Institute emphasizes the thematic approach to teaching — bringing the real world into the classroom and incorporating an interesting topic into math, science, social studies, and language arts. "Michigan, like most states, was concerned about improving test scores," Moore says. "This thematic approach excites students and makes school learning more related to the real world. If learning is fun, then a lot of learning will take place."

Teachers who attend the Institute receive scholarships provided by agricultural commodity groups, local agribusinesses, and various university departments. A local grocery store chain even sponsored a reunion for Institute alumni, held during homecoming weekend at Michigan State.

The Michigan AITC program is working closely with educators who serve the state's gifted and talented students. "To make sure our agricultural industry remains competitive in a global economy, we must attract our nation's best and brightest," Moore says.



Editor's Note

In this issue of Notes is the agenda and registration for the 1992 National Ag in the Classroom Conference. The conference will be in Orlando, Florida, June 6-9, 1992. The agenda is packed, so we hope you will come early and stay late. Please read the instructions on the registration form carefully and return your registrations to me as soon as possible.

Forest Service Materials Help "Treeture Teachers"

The average American uses seven trees a year. Four people's annual paper use weighs as much as a large car. Together, Americans use over one-and-a-half billion trees annually, including paper, wood, and other products made from trees.

Because environmental awareness is directly linked to the need to plant and protect trees, Earth Day and Arbor Day will be celebrated together this year on April 21. To help teachers and students learn more about trees and the vital role they play in our natural environment, USDA's Forest Service has developed a new set of teacher materials that will be appropriate on Arbor Day ... or throughout the year.

The materials introduce students to characters called Treetures™. These fantasy characters, who first appeared at last year's Arbor Day celebration, promote ecological awareness in young children. The Treeture program, a cooperative effort of the Forest Service, the American Forestry Association,

and Trees for the City, a project of the L'Enfant Trust, emphasizes the importance of trees to the survival of our planet.

The Treetures are a community of characters dedicated to tree planting and teaching the value of trees to young children. By combining education and entertainment, the Treetures help children understand the need for trees, how they function, and the importance of protecting and caring for our natural environment.

From the Rooters, who encourage trees to grow, to the Sunbeam Team, who direct sunlight to the leaves so the tree can produce oxygen, the Treetures offer a whimsical look at a serious subject.

The world of Treeture creatures was created by Judith H. Blau, a children's author and product designer, who has volunteered her services and characters to the USDA Forest Service for the America The Beautiful Tree Program.

Teachers can receive a free packet of materials that can bring the Treetures to life. Treeture costumes can be rented for special events. Contact Pamela Speka, USDA Forest Service, 201 14th St. SW, Washington, DC 20250; (202) 205-0976.

Treetures™ representing different aspects of tree growth and care can promote ecological education for young children.

Spotlight

Ag In This Classroom Helps Raise Test Scores

Combine an enthusiastic teacher, a supportive principal, and the Ag in the Classroom program and what do you have? A new way of teaching that has excited students ... and improved their standardized test scores.

Two years ago, an administrator in the Lansing Public Schools asked fourth-grade teacher Mary Schultz if she wanted to attend a new summer institute. "He mentioned that it had something to do with agriculture," Schultz recalls, "and that I would be representing the



Lansing Schools. Other than that," she says, "I had no idea why I was going."

It didn't take her long to figure it out. From the minute she arrived at the Michigan Institute for Ag in the Classroom, Schultz began to see opportunities for incorporating agriculture into her teaching. "I have always used a thematic approach to my teaching, bringing the outside world into my classroom" she says. "Ag in the Classroom opened my eyes to a whole new world."

The kickoff for the year came in September — National Ice Cream Cone Day. Not only did students enjoy eating an ice cream cone, but they also visited a nearby dairy farm to see where the ice cream had come from. While they were there, the class saw two cows give birth. "That was the best way to help our

students see that agriculture has to do with real life," Schultz says.

Every experience leads to another. Students write about their farm visit, for example, and then read each other's writing. They hold candles to eggs and then graph what they see. "The children love to go out and look at the farm, at the machinery, the crops, the animals," says Jack Keyes, the principal of Northwestern Elementary School and himself a graduate of the Michigan Summer Institute. "What we've done is to use all of those kinds of things as motivation for students to read and write. It's all so logical; I can't imagine why we didn't do it sooner."

Lansing is surrounded by farms, so Schultz expected that some of her students would have a basic understanding of agriculture. "Unfortunately," she has learned, "no one ventures any farther than McDonald's or the movie theater. So we are raising an entire generation of students who know almost nothing about how their food is produced."

For example, the first grade teacher, who attended the second summer institute at Schultz's urging, installed a large cardboard barn in her classroom. The barn was decorated with drawings of various farm animals. "Still," says Schultz, "when she asked the children what the building was, they said it was a garage."

When the year-end results from the Stanford Achievement Test came in, Schultz found another benefit to her year-long effort to bring excitement and learning into her classroom. Scores jumped dramatically — including one child who rose from the ninth percentile in reading and math to the 56th percentile. "I really believe my enthusiasm paid off," Schultz says. "We're going to watch the scores this year, but I attribute this dramatic rise to the enthusiasm that our children had for learning. That's directly related to the Ag in the Classroom program."



Using thematic teaching that integrates agriculture year-round, teacher Mary Schultz has seen her students' achievement levels soar.

Exhibit, Video Build Ag Day Excitement in Indiana

Ag Day offers an opportunity for agricultural organizations to sponsor a local event that will attract attention ... and educate children. That's what's happened in Indiana, where each year an exhibit titled "Food From Farm to You" attracts thousands of students and teachers.

The exhibit at the Indiana State Fairgrounds reaches approximately 2,000 fourth grade students from the Indianapolis Public Schools. This year, the Ag Day committee will keep the exhibit open one evening and will invite the general public to attend.

The Ag Day display uses a favorite food — pizza — to help students learn about how foods move from farm to table. "Pizza includes all four food groups," says Pam Bright of the Ag Day Committee. "And, of course, it's a food that kids love!"

Students visit four stations — one representing each food group. Each station includes learning activities that involve all five senses.

In the grain exhibit, for example, students have a real hands-on experience as they put their hands into bins of winter wheat. In the exhibit devoted to fruits and vegetables, an actor wearing a tomato costume sings and

dances. In the dairy area, students see a mobile milking machine and have a chance to pull and stretch string cheese. They learn about meat as they watch a volunteer grinding cuts of meat to make sausage, a favorite pizza topping.

To tie everything together, each student receives a piece of pizza and a small cup of milk. While they munch their pizza, students watch as FFA members introduce them to some of the animals found on a farm.

For many students, the Ag Day tour is the first exposure they have had to agriculture. "One little boy didn't even know the difference between a horse and a cow," Bright says.

"Food From Farm to You" does not focus only on agricultural production. To help students see how food moves from farm to their homes, the exhibit also features a large semi truck.

This year, to encourage other Indiana counties to launch a similar Ag Day celebration, the Ag Day committee has developed a promotional video that gives an excellent overview of the "Food From Farm to You" exhibit. The video is intended for use with county Ag Day committees that want to offer a similar field trip in their own county. The committee also developed a "how-to" guide.

For more information on how Indiana celebrates Ag Day, contact Pam Bright, Education Coordinator, Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 150 West Market, Suite 414, ISTA Center, Indianapolis 46204.

Forgetful Kangaroo Rats Reseed The Nevada Desert

Anyone who has ever forgotten a set of car keys can sympathize with the plight of kangaroo rats in Nevada's Great Basin. But, say USDA researchers, the kangaroo rat's forgetfulness is an important part of the desert ecology.

"At night, when it's cooler, kangaroo rats gather native grass seeds and dig shallow holes to store them," says William S. Longland of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"But sometimes they forget where they stash them," he says.

One of the rat's favorite foods is Indian ricegrass seed. Over 100 years ago, Paiute and Shoshone tribes collected the seed for food—as do the furry, tan kangaroo rats today. Caches of Indian ricegrass seed forgotten by the animals appear to be the primary source of new ricegrass seedlings in the desert, says Longland, an animal ecologist at the Landscape Ecology of Rangelands Research Unit in

Reno, NV. The unit is operated by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

"We're just beginning to understand the complex interaction between native plants and animal communities in the desert," says James A. Young, research leader of the Reno Lab. "In this desert environment, anything that gives a forage plant a survival edge can add food for livestock and wildlife, plus vegetation as a buffer against erosion."

Scientists at the Reno station found earlier that seeds of ricegrass germinate better if they have been inside the rat's cheek pouch. "Why this happens isn't clear," Longland says, but he has found two types of beneficial fungi in their cheek pouches. One of them, saprophytic fungi, may promote seed germination, while the other, mycorrhizal (that's right—3 R's) fungi, help plant roots get nutrients.

"If the size of the kangaroo rat population in an area and the soil characteristics are known, it would help tell how well Indian ricegrass would grow when planted for forage," Longland says. Another payoff: being able to predict how well the environment can recover from a range fire.



Nevada's forgetful kangaroo rats help reseed the desert with ricegrass, ARS researchers have found.



Understanding The Many Faces Of Agriculture Through Quality Education

National Ag in the Classroom Conference
June 6, 7, 8, 9, 1992

Peabody Hotel
9801 International Drive
Orlando, Florida 32819
Telephone: 407/345-4520

Saturday, June 6:

8 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Set up exhibits
1:00 - 6:00 p.m.	Registration (The Challenge Box)
4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Regional & Canada Meetings (Optional)
6:30 - 9:00 p.m.	Banquet - Welcome to Florida Bell-ringers
	<i>Two minute ideas that you can adopt to strengthen your AITC program</i>

Sunday, June 7:

8:00 - 9:00 a.m.	Newcomer's Meeting
9:00 - 11:00 a.m.	State Contacts Grant Writing Seminar
Afternoon	Local Farm and Agricultural Industry Tours

Monday, June 8:

8:30 - 9:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast	10:00 - 10:15 a.m.	BREAK
9:00 - 9:10 a.m.	Opening Remarks/Instructions	10:15 - 11:00 a.m.	Repeat Concurrent Workshops
9:10 - 9:20 a.m.	The Plight of Grady the Cow	11:00 - 11:05 a.m.	Return to Conference Room
9:20 - 9:40 a.m.	Motivational Speaker	11:05 - 11:25 a.m.	Grady's Delivery
9:40 - 10:50 a.m.	Global Agriculture Panel	11:25 - 12:25 a.m.	BREAK
10:50 - 11:05 a.m.	BREAK	12:25 a.m.	Board Buses For Epcot Center The Land Exhibit (For Conference Participants Only)
11:05 - 11:35 a.m.	Agri-business Supports Ag Literacy	12:40 - 2:45 p.m.	Visit the Electronic Forum and The Land Exhibit
11:35 a.m. - Noon	BREAK	2:45 - 3:00 p.m.	Return to the Peabody Conference Ends

REGISTRATION

National Ag In The Classroom Conference
June 6-9, 1992

Peabody Hotel
9801 International Drive
Orlando, Florida 32819
Telephone: 1-800-PEABODY

Name: _____

Address _____

Phone: () _____

Important notice: You make your hotel reservations at the Peabody. The low rate of \$58 per night, single or double occupancy, applies three days before and three days after our conference. Be sure to mention Ag in the Classroom when you make your reservations.

Notice: Ground transportation from Orlando Airport to the Peabody by taxi is approximately \$22.00 each way or by any of several shuttle services at approximately \$20 round trip.

REGISTRATION FEE is \$125.00. Make check payable to Ag in the Classroom and return with this form, by April 22 to:

**Shirley Traxler
 Room 317-A, USDA
 Washington, D.C. 20250**

TOURS: (no extra cost)

Sunday, June 7, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
 Tour agricultural enterprises Yes _____ No _____

Tuesday, June 9, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 The Land Exhibit - Epcot Center Yes _____ No _____

DISPLAY SPACE is available at no cost. Yes _____ please reserve exhibit space for me.

I will need _____ table(s); _____ electrical outlet; _____ wall space; _____ other
 Please specify: _____

Date of your arrival _____

Date of your departure _____

Ag in the Classroom---State Contacts

The individuals listed here are key reference persons in each state. If you have any questions, want to make reports, or need more information about your state's Ag in the Classroom program, contact the following:

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Ag in the Classroom Notes

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Washington, D.C. 20250-2200

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